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WHEN YOUTH MET LIFE

MARY HALL LEONARD

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BY

MARY HALL LEONARD

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MARY HALL LEONARD

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NOTE

This poem, written many years ago, contains some true descriptions of natural scenery, but it is not history and has no pen portraits of real people. After a long period of lying idle in my desk it is herewith placed in print as a tribute to the memory of my early home and of past and present friends.

THE AUTHOR.

Go, little book, full long thou hast refused
To venture forth on wavering, untried wing;
But take thy hazard, calmly unafraid,
Nor longer yield to dilatory mood.

Why should a birdling fully fledged remain
Inert and wind-tossed in a last year's nest?
Better to fly and fall, confessing thus
Thy strength and weakness freely to the world.

So I, the author of thy being, tilt
The bough whereon thou slumberest, send thee forth
To fate's adventure, bid thee sing thy song,
Whether or no it find a listening ear.

I praise thee not nor censure. If thou fail
To meet to-day's ideals, these no less
May be outworn as ever-changing time
Shall lift aloft new standards to the world.

At least with stern respect I hereby greet
Within this verse the spirit of my youth;
The soul I am to-day with reverence bows
Unto the soul sincere I sometime was.

Then go, my booklet. Go and utter forth
The thoughts that breathe in thee. If some shall care
To listen it is well. If not, be meek;
Accept the issue. Go and tell thy tale.

WHEN YOUTH MET LIFE

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'TWAS August, and the ripening year had spread
Its wealth of glories o'er the satiate earth;
Soft hues of early Summer were dissolved
In glowing depths of color; here and there
Already Autumn's scarlet brush had touched
Woodbine and sumac, and the goldenrod
Waved yellowing plumes beside each wayside fence.
The jewel-weed had hung its pendants out
As if inviting pretty maids to pluck
Eardrops of gold to heighten beauty's grace.
Gay cardinal flowers upheaved their flaming heads
By meadow brooklets, and on forest edge
Fair bashful asters lifted golden eyes
'Neath fringèd lashes veiled. The gentle breath
Of violet, wilding rose, and new-mown hay
Long fled, the summer air was surfeit grown
With fruity smells, while thro' the woodland walks
The clethra's heavy fragrance lingered still.
Like some fair stately dame who lays aside
The simple muslin and the brooch of pearl

That fitted girlhood's freshness, and bedecks
Herself in costly fabrics and displays
Her jewelled treasures, while around exhale
Ambrosial Eastern perfumes, so with charms
That soon must wither from the touch of frost
In sumptuous splendor stood the matron year.

It was the season when from city's heat
And choking dust and stifling poisoned air
Earth's weary workers seek the hills and farms.
Here where the strengthening breeze finds room to blow
'Mong fragrant murmuring pines and singing birds
They find the sweet refreshment Nature craves.
So life renews itself, the rested brain
No more refuses thought, and they return
Revigorate for another year of toil.
Then, school restraints removed, the boys and girls
Explore the woods and picnic in the groves
Or fish for minnows in the brooks and ponds
Through long delightful summer holidays.
Then even the farmers and their busy wives
To whom vacation never comes, may find
'Twixt hay and harvest tiny breathing-space
For a brief excursion to the shore, or drive
To a cousin's farmhouse in the neighboring town.

'Twas in this month of summer rest that we,
Far-flinging every care, a merry six,
Betook us to a small New England lake
And on a wooded island fixed our camp.
Richly by Nature was our covert dowered;
A grove of patriarch pines with leafy roof
And slippery carpet formed the island's crown;
Below, a grassy slope, while lower yet
Tall bushes, tiny trees and hazel copse
For our retreat a graceful border made.
Eastward a grassy capelet shoreward reached,—
Well-nigh an isthmus during summer drought
By teams from mainland traversed. Far removed
From city's rush, no noisy throngs profaned
The privacy; but idlers like ourselves
And rural picnics in these shades might seek
Their simple pleasures.
'Neath an ancient beech
With branches wide outspread we pitched our tent,
And under thickest boughs our hammocks hung.
'Mong sheltering pines a tiny cot we spied,
By sportsmen rudely built who yearly there
Found Autumn hermitage, when many a duck
Decoyed from secret nook, and wild-goose bound
From northern breeding-haunts to southern glades,
Beneath their aim met luckless destiny.

In broad expanse before us, and behind
Through rifts of sombre green, the dimpling lake
Laughed in the sun. Northward it grew more shoal;
Beyond, broad meadows forest background met,
Where o'er the tree-tops could the eye discern
The outlines dim of distant hazy hills.

Southward with bolder curve and deeper bed
The lakelet stretched,—two isles upon its breast;
The one a wooded circlet dense with shade;
An emerald fair the other's grassy face,
Unclaimed by owner and untouched by scythe,
And tempting us in visionary thought
To title virgin soil through prior tilth.

Westward a curious line of sunken rocks
Their straggling summits showed. The boldest bore
The seeming imprint of a mighty foot,
And 'mong the country-folk tradition told
Strange legends of the Giant's Dam and Rock.

In olden time when giants walked the earth,
And gnomes and sprites their woodland revels held,
A mighty spirit made these shores his haunt,—
Of trickish temper, yet in genial mood
Useful to man. Once with the Indians he

A bargain made, a dam of boulders large
To build athwart the channel where the braves
Might spear their fish. The crafty Red Men pledged
An Indian youth, the choicest of their tribe,
As well-earned meed. But when, his labor done,
The Giant came for stipend, false they sent
An aged weakling, ready for the grave.
In wrath the Giant rose, asunder tore
The rocks, with mighty pressure sinking some
In the earth's deep crust; then with a plunge which shook
The isles and made the waters boil and hiss
He sank forever; yet this footmark left,
Enduring witness to a lordlier race
Of the Giant's fury and the Red Man's guile.

With sheltered cove and wooded hill and cape
The lake lay folded in the arms of earth;
While strips of pebbly beach with shining sand
And pearly mussel-shells rare playground made
For children from the farms.
So to this spot
Most dear to Nature's heart, we came to spend
An idle, merry week. We had been friends
In earliest childhood; by these shores had played,
Flinging smooth pebbles o'er the skipping wave,
And building houses under stately pines;

In the moist beach we dug our wells and scrawled
Our names with those of favorite friends enlinked,
Or gathered handfuls of Sabbatia blooms —
Pondroses was the childish name they bore —
Which in midsummer rosy setting made
To frame the crystal mirror of the lake.
Now older grown, from variant paths we sought
In childhood's well-remembered haunts to find
Rest for awhile from toil, and link again
Associations of the sunny past.

Two of us now were teachers. We had come
Holding vacation as a well-earned right,
With pedant books and fret of discipline
Securely locked behind the schoolroom door.

And one, a quiet, simple girl, whose days
With household cares were filled; yet while she wrought
Prosaic tasks, her spirit soared afar
On fancy's wings through realms of blissful dreams;
A poet's nature hers, which held the art
To weave a golden thread through homespun life.

With her a farmer brother;— never knight
More loyal fealty to lady showed
Than to his sister he; e'en while he smiled
In tolerant mood at visions fanciful,—

Yet ever mindful of her slightest wish
Before her thought could frame it, 'twas supplied.
Master of boatcraft he, and knew the pools
Where fish might congregate; nor yet unversed
In books, for though his feet had scarcely strayed
A hundred miles from home, through summer noons
And winter eves, he traversed Arctic seas
With Dr. Kane, and followed Livingston
Through Afric's trackless wastes, or lived again
The ages of the Past in stirring words
Of Gibbon and Macaulay.
With these two
A cousin came, a student freshly crowned
With college laurels, and of mind alert
For universal knowledge; spouting phrase
Of Latin, tasking science, and withal
Ready in wit,— whose fund of mirthful jokes
Drew forth resistless floods of merriment.

And yet one more our little circle held:—
A grave young lawyer, who from distant home
Had come to brush the dust of city street
And musty lawbook from his foot and brain
Among the farms his boyhood knew; and gained
From us, the playmates of his early years,
A glad consent to join our revelry.

New England youths and maidens we, nor recked
Aught of the world's conventions. Little need
Of chaperone advisers felt we then,—
The youthful Puritans of bygone days.

Time's hourglass never seemed its sands to turn
So fast as while we led this jovial life.
Upon a rounded knoll we built a bower
Of birchen frame with woven hemlock boughs,
And tufted moss for native carpet; here
We fashioned rustic seats and bravely decked
The walls with trailing cranberry vines hung thick
With reddening berries, wreaths of clematis,
And dark ground-pine garnered from woodland walks.
Here in the slow-paced summer afternoons
We read our favorite books, or lightly sketched
Gay scenes of camp, and water-glimpses rare
Dotted by gleaming sails of pleasure-boats,
With forest rim, its slender stems of birch
In white relief 'gainst sombrous oaks and pines;
Or sat with folded hands in listless mood
And idly watched the clouds and talked and dreamed.

One day when we in silence long had sat,
Building aerial castles soon to fall,
Unmindful each of other presence near,
Sudden I turned me where our poet maid

Half-leaning on the mossy cushioning turf,
Gazed into airy depths with eyes like stars.
"What is it, Lela? Speak!" I gayly said,
"What wondrous vision, sealed from earthborn eyes
Hath filled your face with rapture? Or what words
Have angel voices whispered in your ear?
Or has the muse an inspiration given?
Unfold your tale!"
Dreaming awhile she sat,
Nor moved nor spoke. At last a playful smile
Shone o'er her lips, which burst in joyful song.

Summer weaves with magic spell
Filmy fetters round me;
Soon her charms I know full well
Prisoner will have bound me.

Sweet allurements all the while
Slyly she is bringing,
Witching kiss and wildering smile
In profusion flinging.

Yet a willing victim I
To the winsome schemer;
Folded in her arms I lie
An enraptured dreamer.

Fleecy clouds and shining wings
Float in azure o'er me,
Formless and ethereal things
Flit like ghosts before me.

Heavenly nectar, angels' cheer,
Unseen hands are bringing,
Siren voices sweet and clear
In my ears are ringing.

Care is banished, passion dulled,
Every sense seems reeling,
O'er my frame by sorcery lulled
Drowsiness is stealing.

Fast enchained and captive led,
Tranced is every comer
If he stoop to lay his head
In the lap of Summer.

Thus bathed in sunshine soft, life's roughnesses
Awhile forgot, like an enchanting dream
Our days flew by. How many weary whiles
Since then, have I on memory's wings returned
To these blest days and found refreshing peace!

Meanwhile our brothers plied the hook and line,
Returning laden with long strings of fish,
Rich-flavored pickerel and the shining perch
With now and then a pout or slippery eel.
Apples and pears in plenty, new-laid eggs,
And creamy milk the neighboring farms supplied.
In gypsy fashion over brushwood fires
We cooked our food, and under moss-hung trees
Our table spread; no costly viands served
At princely banquet half so good e'er seemed
As to our sharpened appetites this food.

What matter though the nights were sometimes chill
Or sudden showers arose! Were not our sires
Of Pilgrim stock? Here where they bravely faced
Famine and cold and hostile Indian tribes,
Should we their children, flushed with youth and health,
Trifling discomforts meet with faltering hearts?

Oft while our brothers rowed with heavier oar
We launched our lighter skiff and challenged them
To merry race. Sometimes in curious mood
We pushed our dory down the winding stream
By which these waters seek their ocean source;

Or up the reedy inlet called " The Arm,"
Within whose solitudes the plover dwell,
Where on the rocks the turtles sunning lie,
And bull-frogs hoarse croak nightly serenades.

When tumbling breezes brushed the glassy lake
We sought the larger boat, our sail unfurled,
And with the keen exhilaration born
Of motion free, flew swift before the wind.
Sometimes at evening's calm we laid aside
The laboring oar, and with the current slow
Drifted along, and pulled with idle hands
The lily-pads and graceful floating-heart.
We quoted favorite lines and riddles told,
While many a tale and merry joke went round;
Or gayly sang till oft from distant boat
Came wafted to our ears an answering strain.

We traced the circle where in measure slow
Roll the Seven Stars that guard the Northern Pole;
Bright Lyra from the zenith o'er us beamed,
Venus and Mars in rare conjunction shone,
And just above the horizon at the south,
With steady hand the Archer drew his bow.

Meantime another Archer bold who loves
The rustic scenes where men and maidens meet
Was slyly hovering near. With certain aim
His arrows sped, piercing the hearts of two.
So the old story was again lived o'er;
When a few later moons had waxed and waned
My girlhood's friend whose fund of sparkling life
Our grave and studious lawyer's heart had won,
Was asked to lay her schoolroom tasks aside
And find her future life in a far-off home.
Smiling, she answered "Yes," and went away;
Dear heart! How long ago that wedding seems,
So fast events have crowded! Her sweet hope
Hath cheered his soul in many a trying hour
Of strange vicissitude.—If they had known,—
If on those summer eves their Fate had stood
Truly revealed before their questioning eyes
And with prophetic finger pointed down
The thorny dangerous path their feet should tread,—
Would not their hearts have quailed such lot to meet?
Would they have dared it?—Ah, perhaps!—who knows?

One afternoon we stood beside the shore
And watched the gathering signs of sudden squall;
For cloud-fraught gusts from north and west had suaged
The day's oppressive heat, while lurid lines

Darted across of zigzag blinding fire,
And rattling thunders rolled. Birds startled past;
We heard the tinkling bells of frightened cows,
And creaking wains of farmers hurrying home;
Now a dead pine-branch broken by the blast
Fell crackling at our feet; and lo!—the lake
Transformed to a sea of ink, while angry waves
Reared milk-like crests, and foaming breakers lashed
The rocky shore. We saw the rain-cloud burst;
Then rushed to gain the shelter of the cot
Just as in torrents the tempestuous flood
Dashed wildly 'gainst our roof and window-panes;—
There hushed with trembling awe we stood and watched
The mighty warfare of the elements.

The storm had rolled away, with parting glow
Of rainbow-tinted clouds; the trees looked forth
In foliage fresh, and beaded sunshine tipped
Each leafy twig. We sought the drying rocks
And gazed upon the placid lake, which gave
An answering smile, its momentary frown
Gone like the tears of childhood. Soon a wee
Sandpiper, slender-legged, unheeding us
So motionless, came running o'er the beach
And paused to drink, lifting his dainty bill
As if returning thanks for blessings given;

Then balanced on a stone, his tiny form
A moment swayed exultant, and he spread
His wings and soared.
Silent awhile we sat
Until the sunset hour with golden light
Flooded the sky and earth and wrapped us round
With glorious mantle of effulgent flame;
Far up through heaven's high vault, and reaching down
Through mirrored watery depths, a city fair
Of equal breadth and height in semblance showed,
Whose wall-foundations shone with precious gems,
Ruby and sapphire and the topaz clear;
Its glowing spires and pinnacles were made
Of shining cloud, and in the midst we saw
A street of gold, as 'twere transparent glass.

Since then, o'er land and sea I've wandered far,
And many a radiant sunset have I seen;
Yet not amid Franconia's sun-kissed vales,
Nor where the crystal waters of Lucerne
Reflect the Alpine glow from Rigi's crest,
Nor where through mellowing haze the splendor floats
And softly melts in calm Italian lakes,
Have day's departing glories to my eyes
Lifted so high the everlasting gates
Whereby the King of Glory entereth in.

Soon in the lingering twilight there appeared
The silvery crescent of the infant moon
And hovered o'er the village spire which gleamed
Faintly above the treetops; till we felt
As though from minaret in Orient lands
We heard the Moslem calling, "Come to prayer,"
And low our heads in reverent worship bowed.

Slowly the night her curtain round us drew,
And lighted glimmering watchfires, and our brows
With gentle breezes fanned; until as ebbs
With stealthy flow the tide along the shore
Our flood of feeling lessened; earthward bent
Our thoughts; the spell was gone, and speech came back.

"To-morrow, friends," I said, "we break our camp
And bid farewell to jovial woodland life.
In leafy Paradise we here have dwelt,
Children of Nature for one gladsome week,
From her hand feeding, on her breast reclined,
While in our ears her secrets she has poured.
Now enter we that feverous Unrest
We call Society, where all life's wheels
With speed are driven, till the worn mainspring snaps
Before its time. Is not the social load
Too heavy grown? Were it not wisdom's part
To turn from wiles of art to Nature's arms?"

"Great was my boyhood's joy," the farmer said,
"When in fresh furrow or on pebbly bank
I now and then an Indian arrow found.
These shores were once a favorite hunting-ground
Of the great Philip, Wampanoag chief,
And many a relic of his hardy braves
Became my hoarded treasure; the round stone
Which ground their corn; the sharpened flint that served
For knife and axe; the hammer once o'ergrown
With curious handle of intwisted boughs,
And many a thin, translucent stony wedge
That tipped their feathered darts and fishing spears.
Such keepsakes and the fireside stories heard
Beside my grandsire's knee inflamed my soul
With longing for the life of a chieftain bold,
Fishing the streams and chasing fox and deer
Through boundless hunting-grounds. But boyish dreams
Were these. I little thought that serious lips
Of womanhood could life like this prefer
To social state."
"My meaning you mistake,"
I answered. "In the cradle of our race
'Neath Asian skies, our Aryan ancestors
Tranquilly dwelt. Not theirs the savage mind
That seeks delight through animal desire,

But under Heaven's blue vault they watched their flocks
And nightly with the stars communion held,
And found a voiceful personality
In every rock and rill and wandering breeze.
True life with Nature is not barbarism;
No savages are we, though in these woods;
Nor were our fathers of that Pilgrim band
Who in these wilds their cabins built."

"But stay!"

The farmer said, "No sentimental search
For Age Primeval here our fathers led;
Far nobler object theirs, and this achieved
They bent their energies to meliorate
Social conditions and o'ertake the East;
Crown of their labor stands our land to-day
Coequal with the foremost. For ourselves,—
'Tis novelty allures; such constant fate
Were banishment; in halcyon days 'tis well,
But chilling storms would fright us home. Even here,
Our social tastes we bring; your woodland garb
So picturesque, your dainty sketchbooks filled
With souvenirs of camp, our well-built boats,
Are these the insignia of uncultured life?
Nay, friend, it were no gain to sacrifice
Our modern implements and plow our fields
With crooked sticks."

Then I, "The Preacher saith
'Many inventions hath the world sought out,
But wisdom bringeth grief, and vanity
And sore vexation are its certain sum;
Be not o'erwise, why shouldst destroy thyself?'
The tree of knowledge bears a bitter fruit,
'Tis 'Double, double, toil and trouble' still;
The fire burns hot, the cauldron bubbles on,
And misery abounds."

"What mood is this,"
He asked, "to fight with pessimistic mind
The tide which through all history gathers force?
I joy in this advancing age, which brings
Achievement marvellous and ever calls
For wider thought."

"You speak in current phrase,"
I said, "but social science may have flaws
By theorists unseen. Why goad ourselves
For what we cannot gain? The boasted march
Of ages soon a funeral march may prove
Across untimely graves. And hardest strain
Is borne by woman's lesser strength. No more
May she devote herself to homelike tasks;
But worries about rights and wrongs, holds views,
And grows more wretched as she grows more wise.

Better, methinks, the dusky Middle Age
When amorous knights drew sword for ladies fair,
Better the lot of women of the East
Slaves in secluded splendor, than the fate
Of Nineteenth Century women of the West!"

"Surely you jest," my fellow-teacher said,
"What hath the darling of an Eastern Court,
Her youthful beauty fled, but toil, neglect,
And then a grave? The fruit of wisdom's tree
You so decry, is noble soul-resource;
Nor time can waste it, nor misfortune steal.
No woman in her senses would resign
The heirlooms of the Ages, or exchange
Her birthright for a babyhood of soul."

"Doubtless my words were idle," I replied,
"No ingrate I. Yet woman's heritage
In Christendom hath added to its boon
Some doubtful gifts; feeling by intellect
Is well-nigh choked, and duty stern and cold
Crushes love's sweetness out. Why waste our lives
O'er knotty questions? Better lapse of thought
Than tanglement of sophistry. Some gain
Derives from foolishness."

The farmer then,
" Hard problems vex each age; no harder ours
Than those our fathers pondered. In despite
Of all your croaking dolors, you would miss
The fruit of Time's advance, no less than I."

" Some gains hath Time achieved," I yielding said,
" I would not choose stagnation; yet at times
I dread the issue of the years. I see
The social order daily more complex,
And still the tension tightening; till I ask,
' Where shall relief be found for nervous strain? '
And weary brain and heart cry out for peace."

The lawyer answered to my chafing mood,
" From passion's tumult and opinion's strife
The wise man turns to walks of common life.
The one relief for natures tempest-tossed
Lies in congenial work."

" Perhaps 'tis here
My trouble," slow I said. " Congenial work
'Tis few that find. To-night in sympathy
We sit; at dawn we strike our tent and drop
The hands of fellowship. You go your ways
Of varied duty; and for me begins

Another year of school, a weary stretch
Of days of thankless toil ensued by nights
Of feverish wakefulness. And to what end?
A little lore, hard gotten, soon forgot,
The children win; while in such prisonment
Bright childhood fleets. And for myself what gain?
I earn my bread and wear my life away
With fretting cares."

The teacher then, surprised:
"How say you thus? Not such to me life's scope!
Peculiar trials vex a teacher's lot,
But companied with rich rewards."

"I know,"
I murmured, "all that pedants boast. Perhaps
If situate like you in school select
I might complaisance find; but in this thrall
Of public service hope and courage fail.
Best efforts 'gainst my pupils' needs offset
Seem hopeless waste. Meantime myself am changed;
Sole intercourse with lower minds to growth
No impulse gives; nor, duties done, can strength
Remain for study; thus my thought is bound
By a narrowing horizon, while I chafe
In hopeless effort, and my temper sours;

Often I lay my weary head to rest
After a harrowing day with self-reproach
For angry words and hasty deeds."

"Alas!
A doleful picture! Pray let me advise!"
Gayly the student said. "Suppose you place
As motto on your schoolroom wall these lines
Of Coleridge, mentor wise for teachers good:
'O'er wayward childhood wouldst thou hold firm rule
And sun thee in the light of happy faces,
Love, hope and patience, these must be thy graces,
And in thine own heart let them first keep school.'"

"My troubles brook no jest," I sharply said,
"To name a list of virtues will not heal
The 'weary day when overtasked at length
Both Love and Hope beneath the load give way.'"

Then he more gravely, "Why not further quote?
'Then with a statue's smile, a statue's strength,
Stands the mute sister Patience, nothing loth,
And both supporting, does the work of both.'"

"'Twould need," I said, "a patience infinite;
But human powers have limitation fixed,
And when poor Patience of her sisters reft
Meets failure, who shall take the burden up?

Or what can Patience of herself achieve?
A loveless, hopeless Patience can but stand
Holding her own against the assaults of ill.
It needs a higher, holier strength than hers,
A mighty zeal, on wings of faith upborne,
To lift humanity from earthborn ways
To realms of truth and light."

"I think we need,"
The teacher said, "at times to close our eyes
To faults, and view conditions at their best.
Should not the gardener sometimes leave the work
Of pruning limbs and pulling noxious weeds
To note the fragrance of a flower or search
For opening buds among the leaves?"

"Most good
In theory!" I captious cried. "In sooth
Both you and Lela are enthusiasts born,
But my dull nature never runs to waste
In wild imaginings; the bright conceits
That please the fancy of the optimist
Elude my earth-bent eyes; the little imp
Of mischief is to me but a naughty child,
Nor can I place him on a pedestal
With glittering halos crowned."

"But nay, my friend,"
She gently urged, "no idle visions these!
Should not the Artist place his picture where
The light of heaven may softly o'er it fall,
And thus the innate beauty clear reveal?
Would the soul of nature, think you, in him find
Interpreter more true, should he refuse
To see the changing lights and shades that give
Expression to her face, and merely paint
In outlines bare? Upon the sea-shore lies
A tiny ball, unsightly, brown and dry.
We look again; the waves have covered it,
The clogging sand is washed away, and now
With spreading fibres delicately wrought
It floats a bit of sea-moss exquisite.
But is the nobler aspect false? Did not
Intrinsic beauty all the while await
The coming wave to make it manifest?
So the ideal is but simple truth
Seen through the medium of a loving thought."

Then I, "Perhaps you're right, but Nature wise
Endues her sons with temperament diverse,
And no small share of earthly work she gives
To plodding, wingless workers like myself.
Yet true suggestion in your words I find;

I think indeed 'tis chiefly faith I lack,
Faith in the labor's end. Though yet more wide
The question ranges. Is this strife, I ask,
For universal education wise?
Our fathers were content to teach the boy
His duty to his God, his fellow-man
And native land; to live a virtuous life
And die in peace. But every modern child,
Whate'er his sphere, must clever smattering gain
Of every craft. Instruction thus becomes
A task Herculean; childhood's artlessness
Is banished; shallow knowledge takes the place
Of depth; and knowing men with little minds
Employ their crudities for trait'rous ends."

Once more the lawyer spoke: "I too have felt
How powerless to insure the public weal
Is all our schoolcraft. Manual labor must
For most mankind, perforce, find daily bread.
Nor count such lot unhappy! If the sum
Of human joys be reckoned, who shall dare
Affirm that fuller measure is vouchsafed
To learning's votaries than to sons of toil?
But useless scholarship may render these
Unfit for lowly work, yet not equipped
To grasp earth's higher prizes, or compete

With men of keener thought. No sadder sight
Is seen than feeble minds essaying work
Beyond their scope. Crude knowledge broadly cast,
Like rootless sea-weed mixed with frothy scum,
Floats on the surface of the tide of thought
And clogs the freighted bark that passage seeks.
Out of this knowingness grow atheism,
Office corruptions, speculations rash
And juggling snares to trap unwary fools;
Not so are States made safe."

"If public ills
No remedy in education find,
What then?" the farmer asked. "Is there in law
Protection adequate?"

"Nay, not in law!
Though Heaven should send, as claim the Jews, a code
Of laws direct, what were their worth without
The men to execute? Our statute books
Bristle with dead enactments. Lawmakers
May legislate till doomsday 'gainst all wrong
With no effect, because the will to press
The penalty is wanting."

"Is there then,"
The farmer asked, "for national disease
No cure?"

"Our only hope," he answering said,
"Lies in strong leaders. Few are they who hold
The reins of power. Our rulers should possess
Trained intellect, untarnished honor, breadth;—
Then education proves puissant force
To lead the multitude. But 'tis not well
That every scatter-brain should freely prate
Of themes abstruse which wise men fear to touch
With hand incautious. Such do seldom vent
Their own opinions; they but iterate
The dogmas of their latest oracle;
To-morrow comes another prating knave
Making demands for credence and they turn
And straight unsay all that they said before;
Like tinsel weather-vanes to surface spread
They shift with every idle breath that blows."

The farmer then, "I marvel much to hear
From lips of one born on New England soil
Such scornful words with sentiments effete.
Thought is alive; we breathe a bracing air;
Even though crudity may often mar
The movement, yet 'tis surface froth,—beneath
The steady current flows. Better by far
Some skim of rashness than stagnation's hush;
Better is teeming life than stifling death;

Better the shallow, rapid, noisy brook
With waters eddying round their stony bed
Than the dank, noisome pool which lurking hides
In narrow confines and pollution breeds.
No Old World Aristocracy we want! —
Set bounds to knowledge and you bring return
To feudal night; or else the humbler ranks
Will burst their hated bonds and anarchy
Engulf the land in blood."
" You miss my thought,"
Argued the lawyer still. " No recreant I
To faith American; nor would I place
Bars to the progress of the poor man's son.
From lowly rank hath many a genius stept
To high renown. But genius hath no need
Of rock-hewn steps to scale the precipice;
The lion shows his lion-nature still
Though reared among the sheep; a Franklin needs
No help from adventitious circumstance.
Give freest chance to all, say I! — Then those
Whom genius prompts will prove that fortune smiles
On such as have the power to help themselves.
Events all cluster round the lives of *men.*
The hero who by kingly nature holds
The right divine to rule his fellow-men,
— A right inherent, not inherited,—

One such alone may make or mould a state;
But baser minds must follow as they're led,
And it is feeble statesmanship, I ween,
To put edged tools in every idiot's hand."

"I like not that," the farmer stoutly said.
"Men do not make the times, but times make *men!*
Louis Magnificent indeed may boast
'Lo, I am France!'—But his successors learn
At fearful cost that nations are not born
To aggrandize kings. Out from the people steps
Our chosen ruler each quadrennial year;—
His term expired, the nation's later choice
Taketh the pledge of office and the first
Retires a simple citizen once more.
Movements are more than men! Deathless ideas
Are the true leaders! He who in the van
Waveth the banner, is but ensign still;
The leader falls, another takes his place;
The gap is closed, the impetuous throng sweeps on.
Time's mighty epochs with resistless force
O'erwhelm ambitious hopes and towering forms,
Bury from sight the loftiest lives and prove
How insignificant are men compared
With the vast movements that make History."

He paused and silence o'er the circle fell.—
Musing awhile we sat amid the plash
Of rippling waters, while the crickets shrilled
Autumn's first notes, and clamorous katydids
Answered from pine to pine. Our mingled thoughts
Compassed events of childhood and the cares
That older years had brought, or wistful strove
To penetrate the future's mystery.

The farmer told of longings to achieve
A broader life among the ranks of men;
But filial duty held him bound. Severe
Had been the struggle this long-cherished hope
To lay aside, and the laborious life
Of a New England farm had sorely chafed
Ambition's restless mood. "And yet," he asked,
"What is success? Who knows?"
The teacher then,
"Do you recall, 'mong songs of school, the one
'Biding at Home'? Let's sing it now!" Then clear
Her voice rang on the evening air, while we,
As best our memory served, joined the refrain.

THE HEART THAT BIDETH AT HOME

The wide world open lieth,
The sea-foam tosseth free,
The wind blows shrill over forest and hill
And the river is turning the hurrying mill
As it flows to the surging sea.

There's a sheltered nook on the hillside
Where the bluebird doth earliest come
To build its nest as the cherished guest
Of him who bideth at home.

The venturous traveller roveth
From pole to tropic zone;
His lands hath he sold that he may behold
The pageants of princes and treasures untold
Though naught can he claim as his own;

But the gentle heartsease groweth
Familiar walks beside,
And contentment shall brim the beaker of him
Who tranquil at home will bide.

Ambition's proud allurement
May tempt the mind to stray,

Seeking fortune and fame and frivolous aim
Through intricate pathways of folly and blame
Till life is frittered away.

But peace her olive branch bearing
Shall back to her refuge come,
Like the storm-tost dove no longer to rove
From the heart that bideth at home.

Again the teacher musing spoke: "How fast
The changes come!" she said.—"Ten years from now
These isles, this lovely lake, will be the same,
Yet we, and all our little worlds be changed."

'Nay," said the farmer, "Time's assiduous hand
On nature too will ruthlessly be laid.
These woods by growth and axe will varied be;
This rock, whereon we sit, is yearly moved
By icy pressure up the shore's incline;
'Tis said that all those wooded swamps that reach
To westward, once were lakes by Indians fished;
In the brief stretch of years my memory spans
This lake has altered, wider is the marge,
Less deep the waters, and the contour changed."

"How sad to think it!" I exclaimed, "I shrink
From strangeness, and would find some spot unknown
To Time's remorseless touch."

The teacher then,
" I welcome change; without its lifting veil,
There were no room for hope,—the brightest boon
Bestowed on suffering men. Sorrow no less
Than joy is transient; yea, and happiness
Blissfuller seems through contrast with the ill.
Yet yonder stars have looked with steadfast eyes
On countless generations; when we tire
Of earth's unrest, then may we turn our eyes
To things enduring in the heavens."
But while
Forward and back our fitful fancies strayed,
In silence pondering the former theme
The student sat, and after pause, to this
He brought us back.

[*But why should I prolong*
Such busy argument, misusing forms
Of verse to build its scaffolds? Sure the Muse
Must frown at such perversion, deeming prose
The fitter medium for such structural ends.—
Should I not then forbear this lengthening tale
Of linked discussion under Poesy's seal?

But stay! How often hath the Sister Arts
— Sculpture and Painting —limned in colors deep
Or chiselled in fine marble those austere
Yet human types that marked New England's strength!

Then should the Poet's art refuse to trace
The picture of these youthful Puritans
With earnest, unpruned zeal confronting straight
The ageless problems of the human soul?]

Slowly the student spoke: "This rapid age
No menace for the future holds, I ween;
Herein our safety, wisely to prevent
That weakened spot should cause unequal strain
To social order. In the nation's life,
And man's alike, should faculties unfold
In harmony, none slighted and none forced.
Neglect the physical, the race declines,
Disease and death hold carnival. Exalt
The body more than mind or soul,—then men
Are tyrants, women slaves, the aged die
Uncared for, might is right, and gross desires
Bear woful rule.

"If mental culture fail,
Must soul and body suffer like decay;
For hand in hand with ignorance will walk
Disease and sin. Reason unused becomes
Extinct, and men to beastly level sink.
Place intellect too high, and it usurps
The place of God, while poor humanity
Goes down to death despairing and alone.

"Let morals be neglected, conscience weak,
Prisons will overflow, bold robbery
Riot unchecked, and no man's life be safe.
If conscience be exalted at expense
Of mind and body, then its morbid strength
Breeds superstition, bigotry and hate,
And death to individual liberty.
The page of history proves this constant law
Of symmetry in growth for men and nations, else
The life is out of poise and ruin threats."

"Then would you seek," I asked, "to teach
All wisdom's lore to all?"
"Why not?" he said,
"Learning's resources all are good; she ne'er
Is dangerous, except for unknown truth
Beyond. And e'en though common minds mistake
Half truths for wisdom, yet the remedy
Is not to curb, but freely to supply
The needed culture. Would you shut the plant
Misshapen in its growth, in cellar dark?
Nay, rather, wouldst not let the blessed light
In fullest radiance in? Then will the germ
Soon put forth buds upon the side that seemed
But dead before."

" Your words seem fraught with truth,"
I answered, " but the race and not the man
The unit is. Society hath needs
Most varied, and should nourish men and minds
Of differing mould. Likeness in social life
Were tedious. One may hold his little whim
Aloft; another mind will toward the world
Turn other face of polyhedral truth;—
Let but the balance of the whole be kept,
Then difference will not lessen social strength."

" Search through the forest depths," he said, " and find
Two trees in every point alike; not such
In all that leafy shade; nay, every leaf
Bears its specific marks of form and tint,—
No tedious sameness there!—yet every one
Is reaching toward the form symmetrical
For its own kind ordained."
He paused,—again
The lawyer took the argument: " I find
Within your specious reasoning a flaw;
The best fruition of a life were not
Its own perfection, but to leave some boon
To bless mankind."

" The human faculties,"
The student said, " are common heritage;
E'en though they dormant lie, yet are their germs
In every soul existent, and were meant
To grow. I take it, he best serves his race
Whose self the race ideal best displays."

The lawyer then, " Life is too short, and life's
Criterions too stringent are for one
To reach them all. No man hath aptitude
For many arts, and versatility
Is a doubtful talent. Many a clever lad,
Product of modern schools, sets forth in life
Smacking of much, in nothing versed; and soon
Vagrant in work becomes, Jack at all trades
But master hand at none. Yet lowly powers,
Concentrate, marvels oft achieve; and when
A mind of giant stature single aim
Pursues, a genius rises on the world."

" Genius, forsooth! " the student cried. " Methinks
That were a euphemism for nerve disease,
A growth abnormal of one faculty
With dwarfage of the rest; as though a man
Should be all hand or nose. Engrossment brings
Insanity.—'Tis facile power to change

Relations, giveth health. A genius seems
A monster — not a giant — who demands
Selfish exemption from all social laws."

Then I, impetuous, " Genius worth the name
Is truest saneness, oft by grovelling minds
Misunderstood. The world can well afford
To shelter natures sensitive, and bear
With mood eccentric, which alone perhaps
Makes genius possible."
Hot the reply,
" Save me from men who pose as finer clay
Than common sons of earth! "
Impatiently
The lawyer protest gave: " These sentiments
Are out of date. The highest genius known
Is talent for untiring work."
But I,
" 'Tis only those of genius destitute,
Would so define! A world-wide difference lies
'Twixt facile talent drawing waters out
From public wells, and that creative force
Which giveth rise to fountains fresh, itself
Fed by supernal springs."

Swift the reply,
" Whether 'twixt genius and high talent lies
Difference in kind or only in degree,
I argue not. But this alone I say:
That steadfast purpose wed to mind robust,
If it be not genius, yet is close allied,
And beareth royal offspring. Noblest gifts
If scattered come to naught; what imbecile
Would bid a Raphael learn all handicrafts?
And even if mighty isolated souls
May compass many fields, yet common minds
Must seek a focus, if they would achieve.
The man of one idea will make that felt;
There never yet was born a glorious truth
Till men were found to live and die therefor;
— Such are the men who organize reforms."

" The passion for reform," the student cried,
" Hath crazed the world! This is the age of cranks;
Of men who say, ' Whatever is, is WRONG.'
The greatest social nuisance is the man
Of narrow range and strong convictions."

Quick
Came the retort, " Perhaps your taste prefers
The mind so broadened that convictions all
Have fled — a frigid sea of ice.— For such

Words are too feeble to express my scorn!
Earth's vital forces lie in men's beliefs;
For earnestness there is no substitute."

Answered the student, "You'll agree at least
That good doth seldomer result than harm
From zeal o'ertopping judgment."
"Nay," he said,
"Mistaken zeal her own mistakes corrects;
But judgment balanced in too even poise,
'Twixt all opposing claims will halting stand
Till opportunity hath passed it by."

The student then, "The virtue that hath cost
Most blood and heart-break, and hath slowest growth,
Is tolerance, twin of blessed charity.
The bigot knows no justice;—'tis the power
To justly weigh opposing views alone
That fits for fellowship."

With gentle words
The teacher spoke: "Earth's shining records bear
A noble roll of martyrs, devotees,
Simple enthusiasts, oft fanatics called
By selfish men with complex motives moved;
For busy cynic doubt will folly find
In loftiest heroism. Yet was the world

Of these unworthy; naught of pain they recked,
Nor counted dear their lives, as rich in faith
They wrought their missions. Grandest figures these
That lighten History's page!"

"Perhaps," he said,
"Distinction lies 'twixt men of one idea,
And those of single aim. The man who sees
But isolated truth, however pure
His purpose, lacketh wisdom in affairs,
And must by ill-timed zeal antagonize
The men of differing judgment. Seen afar
He seems majestic, as a shadow cast
In long perspective takes colossal shape;
But those who stood the nearest to the souls
Called heroes, witness of collisions rude
And wordy warfare waged by stubborn wills."

Then I, "The mind in even balance poised
Hath light, not fire, and can not warm men's hearts;
Unerring judgment ne'er can make amends
For ardor's loss; our faulty natures hold
Most dear, the soul sometimes by passion fired."

Answered the student, "Yea, the common mind
Is more impressed by lightning than by rays
Of the all powerful, steadfast-shining sun.

Is the sun cold because of dazzling light?
The ample courtly nature, held in rein,
Is oft misjudged by scorners who discern
Greatness but in one magnitude enlarged;
So the cathedral grand, by perfect form
Deceiveth unto smallness till it find
Comparison with lesser structures near.
Proportion giveth worthiest power. All truth
Is linked with all, and naught is truly known
If viewed apart from its relations wide."

Quickly the lawyer, "Vaporing words are these!
The world is full of men of boasted breadth
Who prate in generalities, and deem
Details and special aims for grovellers fit.
Far nobler he, who with untiring zeal,
Searches the smallest corner of the field
Of thought;— the truth for which he pays his life
Be it the structure of the insect's eye,
Or rudimentary spore of tiniest plant,
Hath genuine worth. The world can spare the man
Who to self-culture bows as idol god.
From each it wants his best; restriction brings
Achievement; and large recompense it bears
When aims distracting to a noble end
Are gladly sacrificed. The narrow stream

Cutteth its channel deep; the pointed shaft
Sinks farthest in the earth. From boundless wastes
Of ocean, cloudless vapors daily rise
Unseen, unfelt, through realms of atmosphere;
But let the force that parts their molecules
Be pent in narrow limits and it makes
The power which drives our engines, carries trade
And is the strongest servant of the world."

So, through that summer evening on the rocks
We lingering sat, while westering stars rolled by,
And loth to break our little circle, held
Rambling, yet sequent, idly-earnest talk.

But Lela had not spoken; she had sat
As one in revery lost. I see her still,—
Her figure darkly outlined on the sky,
Her face upturned to meet the watching stars;
—A girlish form, a woman's thoughtful face,
A head of queenly mould, with tresses fair
That shone in sunlight, and escaped their coils
At invitation of each wandering breeze;
—A simple nature, truthful, loving, shy,
But bold in utterance when conviction pressed;
—A quick, retentive memory, and the will
To feed her love for study and to find

The beautiful 'mid hostile household cares,—
Such was our Lela on that summer night.
Since then the beauty which she always loved
Round her in larger measure hath been poured,
And in her ripened womanhood she sheds
In many a stricken heart and straitened home
The radiance of her lavish gifts and smiles.

Motionless sat she, till her brother spoke:
" And have you, Lela, not a single word
Of contribution to our evening's talk? "

With hesitating lips she made reply,
" Your words before me vividly have brought
Grandfather's last Thanksgiving Day on earth.
You all remember him? "
Indeed we did;
— For many years the preacher in yon church,
Who, forced by failing energies to yield
His parish cares to hands of younger strength,
Had spent his evening days in Lela's home.
His snowy beard and long, white curling locks
Gave him the aspect of some prophet bard,
Or to the lively fancy might suggest
White Winter's self in hoary tableau set.
All children loved his genial face to greet,

And oft he'd gather them about his knee
To tell them stories of the olden time.
Clear to the last his mental powers had shone,
And made his conversation the delight
Of all the dwellers in that countryside.
On that Thanksgiving Day he preached again
To his old people — afterwards at home
With sons and daughters and their children kept
For the last time New England's festival;
Seeming in wonted health he sought his couch,
But in the night the spirit freed itself
Leaving a smile upon the old man's face.

Lela resumed, " 'Tis nearly two years now;
Stronger than usual that day he seemed;
But as he started for the church he said,
' My time is short; I pray that I may speak
Some lasting words of counsel and of cheer.'

" Well I remember how my soul was thrilled
The while he told us how Jehovah led
His ancient people through the desert waste,
And that the earth is still his sovereign care;
And how by ways mysterious, still He brings
Order and peace from Earth's confusions dire.
Briefly he traced the years himself had known

E'en from the century's birth — events profound
By a single lifetime spanned — great wrongs made right,
Dangers averted, knotty questions solved,
And gracious gifts to men and nations given.
With earnest, strenuous words he pointed out
Pitfalls that wait a hurrying age, the need
For faith and action with a firm resolve
To make God's will the only aim and law.

" And then with trembling yet triumphant voice
And far-off look like raptured saint, he said,
' Life's work for me is done; my journey ends;
Before my feet Death's Jordan rolls its wave;
Yet for a moment to my sight God shows
The promised glory that awaits the world.
All kingdoms of the earth shall one day be
Kingdoms of righteousness and of our Lord;
—All kingdoms — *all* — the nations not alone,
But realms of art and science, wealth and power
Shall yield their trophies at His blessed feet;
— Such vision my dim eyes perceive from afar;
And now, O Lord, my soul shall go in peace,
Knowing that in the fullness of the times
Out of the storm-tost elements shall rise
Infinite unity toward which all truth
Forever tends, the kingdom of our God.'

" The service done, at home he quiet sat
A little while apart with wearied look,
But soon with freshened vigor freely shared
The day's festivity. The friends were gone,
The little ones in bed, yet lingered he
Later than was his wont, with me beside,
My cheek against his knee;— deep in my heart
Lieth the impress of the talk we held
That last dear evening ere he went away.
After his voice was stilled, with memory fresh
I wrote his words — sacred mementoes they.
The flickering firelight o'er his silvered brow
An aureole shone; his hand caressing laid
Upon my hair, the benediction seemed
Of sainted seer.

" 'The world recedes,' he said,
' The gate of heaven opens; soon my feet
Shall tread celestial streets. Life's pilgrimage
Lies dim behind me, short and mercy-crowned;
For all the way He led me, for life's joys
And griefs and cares, for doubts that brightened faith,
For tears that watered love and frustrate plans
That led me to His service God be praised.'

" 'To me the way looks long,' I said, ' my life
Lies dark before me; whither shall it lead?'

" 'Thy Father knoweth; He will make it plain.
And yet, dear child, with life's mistakes unmade,
How gladly would I save thy tender feet
From thorns of pain and sin! But tenderer love
Than mine doth compass all thy ways; whene'er
Thou needest light, the light shall surely dawn,
And every path is good which leads us home.'

" 'He leadeth those who follow,' slow I said,
' But I mid care's confusions scarcely know
Whether His voice or mine own wayward will
Direct my steps.'
" 'Lela,' he gently said,
' I sealed thy name in baptism, and for thee
Through all thy life I've prayed. To God's good care
I'll trust thy ways. Yet look thou well, my child,
To know what impulse rules thy life. The world
Hath much to wean from Heaven; wealth, pleasure, fame,
Reach glittering prizes for their votaries' grasp;
— What are they worth if we God's favor lose?
Who chooseth lowest good must highest miss;
But he who highest seeks with single eye,
Is satisfied, nor sighs for lower joys.
None can two masters serve; who findeth God
Droppeth all hindering load; e'en lawful things
May inexpedient prove; unmeasured gain
Doth such denial give.'

" 'Grandpa,' I asked,
' Which aim is worthier, mine own life to mould
To true proportion, or to bless the world
By noble deed? '
" 'Think well, my child,' he said,
' Doth not the selfish end itself defeat?
For others' weal let self ennobled be.
Yet is not higher motive e'en than this,
To man vouchsafed? Hast read the legend old
How Offero the Giant sought for years
The strongest for his Master, till at length
By service of Earth's weak ones, in his arms
He bore the Christ-Child and in Him discerned
Lord over Earth and Heaven, the Mightiest One;
Then strength and life forever consecrate
To Him he long had sought, his name was called
Khristophorous — the bearer of the Christ.'

" Then I, ' He sought for years before he found
The Master. Earth's distractions often seem
A darkened maze, in which 'tis hard to find
The heavenly way.'
" 'Yes, child,' he answering said,
' Tired feet may stumble groping in the night,
And careful hearts are troubled while they fail
Of that good part which none can take away;

And earnest souls grapple with questions hard;
Eager they strive, then disappointed cry
"Knowledge increaseth sorrow; weariness
Of flesh from study comes." The Master saith,
"*Learn ye of me.* Earth's learning only gives
Earth's restlessness, but mine shall give you rest."'

"'Grandpa,' I faltered, 'Earth lies close around,
And Heaven seems far away. God placed us here;
At His decree life's questions we must solve;
To traverse well the earthly path methinks
Needeth far more than just the heavenly choice.'

"'My child, mistake me not! The single eye
No requisition makes for narrow thought;
The cumulative purpose rightly claims
Multiform means and methods as her own;
In comprehension dwells simplicity,
No less than in restriction; self-denial
Serves not as end, but means of nobler good.
Heaven's kingdom first be sought, and let the rest
Take lower place; our heavenly Father knows
Our need of these. So like a river strong
Which ever gathereth volume, shall thy life
Flow to the Ocean of Eternity.'

" 'Grandpa,' I said, ' small duties hedge me in;
If I were free some noble work to choose
My life might seem of moment; here I chafe.'

" ' 'Tis God allots,' he said. ' If special work
Be thine, thou'lt hear His call.—Then answer thou!
But look thou well discern betwixt God's voice
And Eli's; nor forestall His time.
" 'Yet few
Are signalled to such service; unto most
Are varied talents given, and none was meant
To be in a napkin hid, but every one
With usury rendered.'
" Still I faltering urged,
' Have not reforms in every age been wrought
By men who bore persistent aim to push
A single truth to its extremity? '

" 'My child,' he said, ' the world sometimes forgets
Or for awhile rejects some vital truth,
And then God often sends a living voice
To force this truth upon the world's deaf ears;
Such men prepare the way for great reforms.
But after these must come the broader man
To fit the new idea to its place.
Once in Judea's deserts rose a voice

Crying " Repent, and make His pathway straight ";
Great was the man, and great shall be his praise!
Yet said the Master, " Greater even than he
Shall be the least within Heaven's kingdom found."

" 'In Him that followed were the treasures hid
Of wisdom; lavishly He emptied forth
Things new and old from His exhaustless store;
Unto the simple, simple words He spake,
And led them to the truth through parables;
Answered the Wise with learned argument,
Preached before doctors of the law, rebuked
The arrogance of Scribe and Pharisee;
He healed the sick in body and in soul,
And none of all those waiting crowds e'er came
With asking heart and empty turned away;
By multitudinous means He finished thus
The work His Father gave Him, the one work
Which all work comprehends — for sake of which
He lived and died — to witness bear to Truth
And make men one with Him who is the Truth.

" 'And as the Father sent Him, even so
He sends His followers now; most fit are they
To do this work, who ever seek to reach
The measure of the stature of the One
In whom all fullness dwelt.

" 'When God would send
The gospel to the nations, chose He Paul,
— A very Jew, instructed in the law,
A citizen of Rome and schooled in Greek —
All things to all, that he might all men gain;
— Yet of his work reporting, " This one thing
Alone I do!" May God's dear mercy haste
The blessed time when all Earth's corners dark,
The homes of sin and wretchedness and death,
And marts of trade, and politics and creeds
And halls of learning and the church of God,
Shall feel the potent personal influence
Of the comprehensive, consecrated man!'

" 'Grandpa,' I said, ' your words are always wise;
And yet forgive me, for it seemeth oft,
That common souls should shun the broadened aim;
That reaching far and grasping widely some
Would fail of all, because too large the prize.'

" 'My child,' he said, ' a truth is in your words;
Too large indeed may man's ambition make
His earthly aims; not always were it wise
For earth-bound wings to essay the realms of air;
Meagre endowment, or a life cut off
From life's full limit, must frustration bring

To earthly aspiration; finite souls
True dignity in limitation find.
But be our aim the doing of God's will,
No failure threatens; He will us prepare
For that which for us He prepares.—Be sure
The work that needs us will us find at last.

" 'What matter which our work so God's be done?
Not monuments reared for the builder's fame
Our deeds, but humble elements conjoined
To form the All-embracing edifice
Designed by the Almighty Architect.
Whether 'tis ours to plan proportions large
Or perfect needful work of low details,
Or if He bid us glorious statues carve
For noble niches, we are workers all
With Him in whom the building fitly framed
An holy temple groweth.—Not to us
The praise, but to His name forevermore!' "

Long had we lingered till the aspiring sun
Had traversed more than half his lower arc;
A moment hushed we sat while solemn thought
And lofty purposes within us stirred;—
Yet ah, how much our hearts undisciplined
Missed of the wisdom stored in Wisdom's words!

Silent and thoughtful, with reluctant step,
And arms entwined, we sought our tent.—At dawn
We broke our camp, and steadfast turned to meet
The burdens of another year of work.

A CAESURA

As one who in the storm's calm center stands,
Knowing that all around fierce winds are driving,
Yet, feeling not their conflict, folds his hands
Heedless alike of past and future striving;
Thus I, of late so driven and hard beset
And sure of untried dangers yet before me,
For a brief while these turmoils all forget,
And feel a holy stillness brooding o'er me;
Passion no longer in my heart is raging,
Conscience with will no more stern warfare waging,
Distressing doubt hath granted sweet release;
Life for awhile with lessened pressure holds me,
Gracious content in calm embrace enfolds me,
And on my quiet soul is graven " Peace."

PART II

From weary wanderings in the fruitless quest
For satisfying aim — a harried stretch
Of restless passionate years — I turned last week
To scenes my childhood knew. Beside the lake
I gazing stood; I marked the wood, the waves,
The isles, the houses — little changed except
For added paint or want of it — a tree
Here and there missing, many another grown
To larger shadow — yet the selfsame spot
Where once I played. I sat upon the rock
Where tasks of school I used to con, and gave
To memory rushing thoughts. The flowers bloomed fair,
The waters dimpled as of old. Yet still
"Are they the same?" I whispered o'er and o'er;
"Are they the same, and is it *I* have changed?"

Our childhood's world grows dwarf to eyes mature;
The sky dome once so comprehensive lies
Contracted, when our curious eyes have scanned
Stretching horizons of the wider world;
The boats — how tiny now they looked — still skimmed
The surface, but by stranger youth propelled.
Along the beach the farmer's children now

Played with the sand and pebbles.—Ah! 'tis these,
The children of the generation then unborn,
That most remind us how the years have sped.

Through all the well-remembered paths once more
I with the farmer walked; surveyed his farm,
His browsing herds, and fields of waving grain;
Here were improvements, garden-walks new-laid,
A vine-clad arbor, costlier implements,
Mute signs of thrift and taste.—" New England farms
Have compensations still," he said. " This life
Was not of my free choosing, yet to-day
Thankful am I that I escaped the rush
Of feverous speculation which perchance
Had proved my ruin. Independence here
Is mine; more safe than city street this farm
For children's playground;—yea, and for myself
Life's avenues are broader than I deemed."
I felt his stalwart manhood; heard his name
With honor spoken; saw the generous works
Of local patriotism his hand had wrought,
And prompt my heart responded, " It is true!
No stinted life is this to spurn with scorn."

Then to the farm of all Earth's spots best known,
By strangers habited, with mingled thoughts
Of joy and homesickness, my steps I turned;

Noted each change:—that maple-tree I knew
As sapling; yonder elm had lost a branch
In Autumn's gale; an ancient granary
Had been removed, an orchard newly set;
This was the old spice-apple-tree, and those
The cherished "wingèd-sweetings,"—bore they yet?
And here, oh, joy! — the gnarled, crooked trunk
Low-branching, where the tiniest, wariest feet
Could safely climb; and this the very bough
Where once we found the nest of a humming-bird,
Fashioned of mullein-down by moss o'er-laid,
With eggs as big as peas. Beside the lane
The scattering clump of tansy scatters still
Old-fashioned perfume; here we used to pick
Handfuls of pungent peppermint,— ah, there! —
I've found a sprig!

I trod the woodland path
That led through tract of marsh o'ercrossed by road
Of corduroy, our favorite way to school;
Those lofty pines could tell a marvelous tale
Of children's frolic when from school let loose
We scampered 'neath their arches,— hurrying thoughts
With smiles and tears beset, a motley crowd,
O'erwhelm the heart revisiting such scenes.

I sat beside the farmer's board, and when
His sweet-voiced wife had led the little ones
Sleepy to bed, we drew our chairs beside
The wide-mouthed fire-place where his grandsire sat
With Lela's sunny hair against his knee.
I asked for Lela,— how her life had fared,
And did she often turn from larger lines
To the home of childhood?
Then the brother told
Of changes swift that swept their roof-tree bare;
Of marriage,— death,— of younger ones gone forth
To fight life's battles, till the home-nest seemed
How empty! — Then as Lela's duties dropped
One after one, she thought she heard the call
To far-off service 'mong Earth's slighted ones;
But God had other plans for Lela; — first,
Long illness closing fast the paths she sought;
And then the gates swung wide to fairer ways;
Now in refinement's home, loving, beloved,
With wealth and loveliness around her poured,
To works of love her life is dedicate;
Patron of art, a friend of struggling souls,
And liberal helper of all liberal aims,
Her gracious heart dispenses with free hand
Heaven's generous gifts. And hers this crowning grace
With every lot true sisterhood to feel;

Welcome alike in palace and in cot,
Her sweet appreciation freely sought
By rich and poor, by simple and profound;
Nay, even the outcast ones no trace may find
Of condescension in her saving aid.
This is the bond that in the Golden Age
Shall social breaches heal, when shall be felt
By gentle and by common, high and low,
The truth that love fraternal binding all
Mankind inheres in that paternal love
Wherein our hearts take refuge every time
We say "Our Father."
But whene'er the press
Of Lela's duties manifold permits
Her longing heart the loved home-nest to seek,
'Tis gala-day for all; — the children think
No face so fair, no voice so sweet, no wit
So merry as Aunt Lela's.
Next I asked
News of the cousin.—Scholarship and fame,
A student's quiet mind averse to mix
In strife of questions practical, had marked
His chosen course. Events scarce seemed to touch
The even life-flow; — genial, tolerant, wise,—
His writings aye had borne the stamp of truth
And noble sentiment. But suddenly

Had come a change; and he whose taste refined
Had shunned admixture uncongenial, now
Stern duty's call had heard that bade to raise
His voice in conflict with a cursèd wrong;
So had he reached a manhood more robust,
Won through conviction that a purpose high
Should take command of learning's regiments,
That fairest culture as an end pursued
Is selfishness, that art and knowledge both
Must bow to human weal.

Then turned my thoughts
Toward other two that shared our gayety
In that brief week.—Knew he of these? For I
In foreign wanderings had too seldom heard
From childhood's friends.

Prolonged the tale he told,—
Three little lives in swift succession struck
By scourge of fatal illness — only one
Left for their solace — loss of wealth through false
And trusted friend; — then, bitterest draught of all,
Revengeful of the lawyer's zeal for right
Came treacherous enmity's accusing threat
With stain of his good name; — till staggered, stunned
And ill, both life and reason long had hung
In poise. Yet God was merciful; no blot

Stained his true heart, and now at last men saw
The honest and unselfish thought so long
Misunderstood. Out of these throes was born
Within his soul a gentler charity
For differing judgments. Calmed by time, his mind
A milder temper now displays.— Yea, more,—
E'en in the wofulest strait was greatest boon
Vouchsafed, to be upheld and cheered by one
Most royal woman's soul that never felt
One doubt, nor wavered in her steadfast love.
— Happy is she who by such soaring faith
Is the salvation of a breaking heart!

Then of my own vexed, wandering life I spoke,
But briefly as one may.—How can we ope
To friendliest eyes the fiery furnace doors
Where is begot the force that moves the wheels
Of life most intricate! 'Twere foolish then
To deem that of those other lives we two
Discerned the truth. Their lives indeed! Of these
We knew as much as of electric power
Knoweth the babe who stares at lightning's flash,
Or as the savage watching on the shore
The tidewave ebb and flow, knoweth the force
That sways the spheres — so lone we live our lives!

With teaching worn, desiring change, had I
Other vocation taken; to this end
In study first at home, and then for years
On foreign soil, with slender means had striven;
Some measure of success had gained, could now
In moderate comfort live, my work at last
Finding fair sale; and drawn by memory's cord
Had come for one more glimpse of girlhood's home,
No longer home to me or mine.— I now
Was left alone; some of my friends were dead,
The others widely scattered, and with homes
And interests distinct from mine; and I
After brief holiday would set my thought
Again to chosen tasks.

Much had I seen
Of curious custom in my changeful life:
I spoke of palaces and pageants gay,
Of Nature's prodigies, of ruins old,
Of perilous adventure, and of scenes
Laughter-impelling met in foreign streets.
I told of squalid poverty and strife
Of social classes nursing in the oppressed
A brood of vengeful thoughts that make grim threat
To social bulwarks. Also told I how
The stars and stripes, sounds of my native tongue
Or trifling sign suggesting home, well nigh

Would move my eyes to tears; for patriotism
Strengthens in exile; he knows best how dear
His native land, who views it from afar,—
These things I told.
But could I also speak
Of frustrate plans, of deviant darkling ways
That faced me with a wall of rock; of doubts
Of duty's leading, dim perplexities
'Mong treacherous pitfalls; of a passionate pain
In which all love, e'en God's, illusory seemed;
Of thirst for fame, of failure's bitter draughts,
Followed by tasted joys that in my mouth
To ashes turned; of searching after truth
That baffled ever by chameleon hues;
And last of all, the drowning grasp for faith
Whose saving cord so near me swung, yet e'er
Escaped my clutching hand; — till, starving strength
All spent, before my straining eyes there rose
One trembling hope,— to see my childhood's home,
Regain my childhood's mind, and start anew
With faith and purpose like a little child?
— Of this and more than this I held my peace.

Full late we talked, in common social parle,
Of passing news, of politics and books;
While the familiar quiet by degrees
Softened the discord in my vehement soul.

At length the embers on the brick-tiled hearth
Burned low, and in their flickering flame appeared
Shapes of the past. With voice and heart subdued
We spoke of vanished faces; of sealed lips
That kissed our own; of moments sacred held
From thoughtless reference; of that summer eve
When Lela's words a message seemed to bring
Thrilling our careless hearts, from saint in Heaven;
Of that Thanksgiving night that heard his last
Wise, gracious words, before he "fell on sleep";
And like a Mother's voice to infant strayed,
I heard again the invitation, "*Come,*
Learn ye of me. Earth's learning only gives
Earth's restlessness, but mine shall give you rest."
My heart made answer, "Even so, I come."

At morn I bade good-bye, and turned once more
To the city's tumult. But how great the change
Two days had wrought! — Is mine indeed the soul
So fever-famished, spent with vigils lone
Wasting its feeble force 'gainst prisoning bars?
O mystery of grace! How calm my pulse!
How hushed my heart! How mercy-crowned my life
Lies futureward!
Perhaps no more my eyes
Shall gaze on childhood's home — no other home
Can e'er claim love so intimate.—But o'er

My heart its benediction lies, as now,
Like laborer worn refreshed by nooning rest,
I turn to meet life's afternoon of work.
Scattered are friends of youth, and ne'er again
May that gay circle here unbroken meet;
Unlike our lives, and life's experience
Hath divers lessons taught us — unto each
What most he needed. Would we dare to change
The courses where All-knowing Love hath led
Our ignorant feet? Clearly at last I see
My life is mine, and so for me 'tis best.

But memory's silken ties shall still unite
Our sundered spirits in the happy past.
This joy is safe; so may we ever hold
Our friends in presence.—Yea, and though our ways
Have wide diverged, do not their curving lines
Meridian-like bend toward another pole?

Nay, rather, while we follow deviant rays
Of luminous truth, scattered and zigzagged oft
By earth's prismatic lenses — as to each
The light is shown — whether the burning red,
Or quiet blue, or shaded violet,
Or glowing yellow,— may they bye and bye
Gather us all where undivided truth
In whitest radiance streams from off the throne!

POSTLUDE

Spirit of ceaseless Change, so mighty, stern and grasping,
With thee at strife we pass our life, yet thy behest fulfill.
Thou seizest every treasure that our hearts are clasping
And workest thy grim will.

Thou takest to thyself our early joys and graces,
Thou hedgest in the fields wherein our youthful feet have ranged,
Thou printest deep thy seal upon our forms and faces,
And life for us is changed.

Each hill and lake and stream of old association
Thy presence feels and o'er it steals an unfamiliar guise;
And we ourselves most changed through fortune's aberrations
Look on with altered eyes.

We cry, "May we naught save from thy rapacious fingers?
Thou claim'st too much." With eager clutch we hold our treasures fast.
While we resist, 'tis done; thy purpose never lingers,
And what thou wilt, thou hast.

Yet is thy rule so harsh? Is there no mercy lying
Hid from our eyes in dim disguise within thy dread decrees?
Hark! Borne upon the wind among the treetops sighing,
Come to us words like these:

"Children of Earth, consider! The wind his circuit maketh;
The supple tree that yields shall be the stronger for the blast;
The trunk that will not bend its uplift head it breaketh,
And sternly hurrieth past.

"It stirreth waves and currents in the throbbing ocean,
And to its destined haven's rest it beareth safe along
The stable self-poised ship across the wild commotion
With movement swift and strong."

Spirit of Change, resisting thy dread control no longer,
Thy coming sure we calm endure and bend beneath thy sway,
So find we that thy touch hath left us larger, stronger,
Nobler from day to day.

Bracing each trembling nerve and all our powers controlling,
With faltering will and courage still sustained by faith sublime,

We yield us to the current adown the world that's rolling,
The changeful stream of Time.

Yet Spirit Great, thy scepter is sign of limitation;
The finite own and they alone, thine undisputed sway;
Through time's terrestrial course with every tribe and nation
Thou hast thy will and way.

Even boundless Truth discerned by finite comprehension
Seemeth to change its form and range as but in part 'tis seen;
It only can be known in full and true extension
In Heaven's clear light serene.

But when, O Earthly Change, thine empery's subjection
For aye shall cease in Heavenly peace, the truth shall then be viewed
In the unchangeable and measureless perfection
Of God's infinitude.

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